

10-8-07 - New sex abuse settlement renews scrutiny of Cal prep schools
By GILLIAN FLACCUS, Associated Press Writer, San Francisco Chronicle
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Bishop Tod D. Brown was lauded three years ago for quickly handling Orange County's share of the nationwide sex abuse scandal in the Roman Catholic Church, reaching settlements totaling \$100 million for some 90 victims.

But a source of nearly a fifth of those cases — two prestigious parochial high schools — continues to haunt the diocese and has now exposed Brown to old allegations of child abuse and the possibility of being held in contempt of court this week.

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange settled four more lawsuits Friday for just shy of \$7 million. Three were filed by former students at Mater Dei and Santa Margarita high schools who said lay teachers sexually abused them.

In a deposition in one of the lawsuits, Brown acknowledged being accused of abusing a young boy more than 40 years ago when he was a priest in Bakersfield. He said the accusation, reported in 1997, is false, but police said they can find no indication it was ever investigated.

Despite the settlement, Brown still faces a hearing Tuesday to determine whether he should be held in contempt of court for sending Msgr. John Urell to Canada for psychological treatment before he could complete a deposition.

Urell, who was responsible for handling sexual abuse allegations against the diocese, became distraught during a deposition in the case of a 27-year-old woman who said an assistant basketball coach had sex with her multiple times when she was a 16-year-old student at Mater Dei.

Plaintiff's attorneys said Monday there was a chance the judge could postpone the hearing at least a month under the terms of the agreement.

Brown told The Associated Press that he did not violate a court order and considers the hearing an assault on his good character.

"My only concern was for Msgr. Urell, who needed immediate attention," Brown said.

Plaintiffs' lawyers say the case involving the coach, Jeff Andrade, shows why the two schools have been a perennial problem: Warning signs were ignored and the abuse was allowed to continue.

Another teacher allegedly intercepted a note that discussed the sexual relationship between Andrade and his accuser, Christina Ruiz, but officials did nothing after interviewing Ruiz, her best friend and Andrade, she said. Andrade later admitted to the relationship in his deposition.

"They made me believe that no one would believe me, they made me believe that it was my fault. They told me that I was the one who seduced him," Ruiz said.

Another plaintiff, now a 31-year-old woman, said Monday that when she told her guidance counselor about a sexual relationship she was having with her teacher, he told her she was a "big girl" and didn't take action.

Mater Dei, widely known for its athletics program that counts Arizona Cardinals quarterback Matt Leinart among its alumni, is responsible for about 15 percent of the cases the diocese has settled since 2001. Another half-dozen cases stem from Santa Margarita, which opened in 1987.

The accused at Mater Dei include a principal, a vice principal, a guidance counselor, a track coach and two choir directors.

"Any girl that came forward at Mater Dei and said that she was engaged in a sexual relationship with a teacher was regarded as a whore, a harlot, a seductress," said John Manly, the plaintiffs' attorney. "It's the 'she-wanted-it' defense."

Sarah Gray, a recent plaintiff who says she was abused about a decade ago, said some of her friends shunned her after she made her claims. She still gets angry calls and e-mails from some former classmates, said Gray, who graduated as valedictorian and went on to Notre Dame.

"This Mater Dei family and the motto 'Honor, Glory, Love' – nobody bought it like I did," said Gray, now 26. "I gave this whole speech about it and it turned out not to be true at all."

Brown insists the schools' records are no different from any other school, Catholic or secular. He said both schools are now monitored for sexual abuse by an independent organization and both received high marks at recent annual reviews.

"I'm sorry it happened in those two schools, it should not have happened there," he said. "But statistically they are not worse than anybody else."

Manly, however, says top management at the schools allowed a permissive atmosphere to flourish.

He points to former principal Msgr. Michael A. Harris, who has been accused of molesting 10 students from both schools from 1976 to 1994. The church has paid at least \$30 million to settle claims against Harris, 60, who has never been criminally charged and has denied the allegations in

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